



Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission
Wednesday, September 19, 2007
Preston Community Center, Preston, Washington

Commissioners present: Julie Stangell, Jim Franzel, Doug Schindler, Leonard Guss, Alex Kamola, Lee Witter Kahn and Doug McClelland

Commissioners absent: Kevin Buckley and Ron Baum

Ex officio members present: Brandy Reed

Ex officio members absent: Marilyn Cope, Randy Sandin and Amy Grotta

Staff: Dave Kimmett, King County Parks Division; Joelyn Higgins, Department of Development and Environmental Services Rural Coordinator; Julia Larson, Office of Business Relations and Economic Development; Kathy Creahan, Farm and Forest Programs Manager; Kristi McClelland, Forester; Bill Loeber, Forester and Linda Vane, Liaison for the Rural Forest Commission

Guests: Lauren Clark and Jennifer Harrison-Cox, Partnership for Rural King County

Meeting Summary

Action Items:

1. Schedule a longer than usual meeting to focus on the Comprehensive Plan Update at the November 8th meeting, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Minutes:

Motion 1-0907 That the minutes from the May 16, 2007 meeting be approved. Approval of the motion was moved, seconded and unanimously approved.

Motion 2-0907 That the minutes from the July 18, 2007 meeting be approved with the following correction: that Bill Loeber be added to the list of staff in attendance. Approval of the motion was moved, seconded and unanimously approved.

Motion 3-0907 That the Chair of the Rural Forest Commission write a letter of support to the Council regarding the sections of Proposed Substitute Ordinance 2006-0407 that pertain to forests, to support the addition of agriculture to the livestock uses already allowed as part of residential development in the Forest Production District and to recommend that the Council

Julie Stangell called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Added to agenda:

Alpine Lake Wilderness Bill – Jim Franzel

Business Relations and Economic Development (BRED) Report

Julia Larson, Rural Economic Strategies Coordinator, BRED

Julia provided an update on the accomplishments of the Rural Economic Strategies (RES) implementation during 2007 and reported on the status of proposed ordinance changes related to forests. She also requested input on future directions for the Rural Economic Strategies.

Julia said that among the accomplishments of the RES is the Rural Business Circuit Rider service, which provides free business assistance to rural cities and unincorporated areas. She said that the Green River Community College Small Business Assistance Program has housed the service under contract. Julia said that another accomplishment of the RES was to recommend the creation of Joelyn Higgins's new position as Rural Permit Coordinator to help people through the permit application process.

Julia shared some of her ideas for potential BRED activities to promote forestry and encouraged the Rural Forest Commission (RFC) to share ideas about economic development related to forestry or forest value-added products. As an example, Julia described talks with Green River Community College (GRCC), which has been doing a series of continuing education classes at lunch. Alex Kamola suggested that Julia contact the Natural Resources Department at GRCC as they are developing a new program to outreach to people in the horticulture trades for whom English is a second language, especially Spanish-speakers. Alex said that to plug those students into business classes would be a good opportunity to get their feet into entrepreneurship, maybe even forestry in King County. Julie Stangell added that the GRCC program is nationally recognized for its high quality and is a tremendous asset that is not always acknowledged.

Following the update on the RES, Julia asked the commissioners for input on several topics. Julia said that BRED could develop a report on the status of forestry in King County, similar to a draft equestrian report that BRED compiled last year. She said that if the RFC thinks it is of value to do such a report for forestry, she would like the commissioners' recommendations as to what should be in the report and how it would be used by forest interests.

Next, Julia said that an economic development chapter has been added to the draft 2008 King County Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) Update in order to give more focus to those policies. Two of the new policies proposed are to share successful policies and programs with other governments in the region and to support the recruitment and siting of needed infrastructure for both agriculture and forestry. Julia's office would like to know if the RFC has specific recommendations as to how to implement these policies.

The last topic introduced had to do with proposed changes in county code related to forests. Julia explained that a package of code changes submitted in August 2006 to the Council, were put on hold because of some controversial elements in the agriculture sections. Now that interested parties have come to agreement on the language in agricultural code changes, the proposed code change package has been submitted again to the Council (Proposed Substitute Ordinance 2006-0407). If the RFC would like to support the code changes related to forests, a letter to the Growth Management and Natural Resources Committee would be appropriate, said Julia.

Julia outlined the provisions of the four proposed code changes that would affect forests. The first change would allow forest thinning in sensitive areas without imposing a six-year moratorium on development, provided the thinning is consistent with a conversion option harvest plan or a county approved forest management plan. The second change would correct a section that requires Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) approval of forest fire protection plans in order to build a home in the Forest Production District (FPD). Kathy Creahan

explained that WDNR does not provide this service, so the proposed correction would make fire protection planning an element of forest management plans approved by the county.

Kathy explained the third change proposed in the ordinance, which also concerns the provisions related to building a home in the FPD. Currently, the code allows additional clearing for livestock if the landowner has a county-approved farm plan. The current code is written in such a way that a person can have horses, but not engage in horticultural activities, such as growing trees. The proposed change would add the word “agriculture” to approved land uses in the cleared area.

The fourth change, said Kathy, is one that was recommended by the Rural Forest Commission last year in a letter to the County Council, but not included in the proposed code change package (Proposed Substitute Ordinance 2006-0407). The RFC recommended that the hourly rate for permits on small properties be reduced and a cap on the full cost of the permit. [Note: The hourly rate for staff work on forest practice-related permits would be reduced to \$57.50 per hour up to a maximum of \$402.50 for practices no more than twenty acres in size, under a Conversion Option Harvest Plan or a Class 4-G non-conversion permit. To qualify for the reduced fee, the property must also be covered by a forest stewardship plan that has been approved by the Department of Natural Resources and Parks.] Kathy explained that the permit fee cap would be part of a fee ordinance change that Department of Development and Environmental Services would propose for all their fees. They do this on a schedule so the time is not yet here, said Kathy.

The commission considered each change in turn. Regarding thinning in sensitive areas, Doug M. asked if there is a definition of and criteria for “forest health” in King County. Alex said that plans are reviewed by the county’s foresters so that provides consistent standards. Doug S. asked if with the growing importance of forest stewardship plans and the increased regulatory significance of the plans, do the foresters need to spend more time reviewing them? In other words, is there an adequate level of staffing for this work? Doug S. said this would be an important thing for the commission to look at and to advocate for if necessary, to assure that there is an adequate number of staff.

With regard to the proposed change on Line 111 regarding fire prevention plans, Len asked if there are guidelines for fire safety best management practices (BMPs)? Joelyn said that the BMPs are in draft form and have been for a couple of years. She distributed a copy of comments received during the public comment period that pointed out some areas where the language of the BMPs needs clarification. Joelyn said that she has been charged with developing new draft BMPs that will reflect public comment. The new draft will be made available for public comment once again before being finalized. Kathy said that in the meantime, the Forestry Program is using the draft BMPs in working with landowners.

Doug M. moved and Doug S. seconded the motion to have the RFC support all four proposed code changes and decided that current Chair Julie Stangell would write a letter of support to the County Council. The RFC invited Julia Larson to come to a future meeting to brainstorm ideas for BRED and the Rural Economic Strategies implementation. RFC members suggested a number of topics that might be included in the future discussion with Julia. Julie Stangell said like the Barn Again campaign, forestry needs a snappy slogan and poster to promote local wood.

Doug M. said that the County Council has given the Preston Community a grant of \$35,000 to start planning for the Preston Mill site and one of the options is a small working mill like Julie has talked about.

[Download the *Rural Economic Strategies* and proposed code changes affected rural economies at <http://www.metrokc.gov/exec/bred/business/Projects/rural.htm>.]

Action: Julie will write a letter of support to the Council regarding the sections of Proposed Substitute Ordinance 2006-0407 that pertain to forests, to support the addition of agriculture to the livestock uses already allowed as part of residential development in the Forest Production District and to recommend that the Council reduce the fees for certain types of forest practice permits on small forest acreages.

Staff Reports

Youth in forestry grant projects - Linda distributed a handout on the eight projects currently funded through the Natural Resource Stewardship Network [<http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/pi/grant-exchange/NRSN.htm>]. Linda said that the program has funded a variety of forest learning experiences for young people and forestry internships for teens on Vashon Island, the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Taylor Mountain and Longfellow Creek. The grant program is funded by the King Conservation District and federal funds allocated to King County under Title III of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000.

Northwest Environmental Forum - Kathy attended this conference led by University of Washington Professor Brian Boyle, who spoke at the July RFC meeting. Kathy said that the conference presented a lot of information about the status of forestry in the state. Kathy said that the Forestry Program staff will continue to track the activities of the Forum.

[See website: <http://www.nwenvironmentalforum.org/>.]

King County Comprehensive Plan and Shoreline Management Plan Updates

Kathy Creahan, Farm and Forest Programs Manager

I. Shoreline Master Program

The RFC commented on the Shoreline Master Program (SMP) update at a previous meeting. Kathy explained that the SMP has been incorporated in the County's Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) as a new chapter. The public review draft of the 2008 Comp Plan will be available soon. Kathy recommended that the RFC members review the Shoreline Master Program chapter and the other sections dealing with forests in the Comp Plan update when the public review chapter comes out [<http://www.metrokc.gov/permits/codes/CompPlan/2008/>].

II. Draft Comprehensive Plan Update Comments

Kathy asked if anyone had additional comments on the draft Comp Plan Update at this time. Doug M. said the paragraph just before proposed new policy R20a: "Over two thirds of the FPD is in public ownership, but most of this is no longer managed for forest production," should be corrected to reflect the fact that are 85,000 acres of state-owned land that is managed for forest production in the Forest Production District and that national forest lands outside of wilderness areas can be harvested. Kathy said that she would make the change and that the paragraph is

intended to explain that in order to “protect” the forest land base it is not necessary to put it into “no touch” status. Doug M. said that it is important to convey that there are more than 100,000 acres in the Forest Production District that are still threatened by conversion, that there are development rights that can be purchases, and that we want the County to continue to have that as a high priority. Julie stated that the Snoqualmie Forest conservation easement is not the end of that need and that Seattle Public Utilities, Washington DNR and Tacoma are still harvesting. Kathy agreed that the point of the policy is that as we use tools to conserve the land base in the Forest Production District, we should be looking to purchase development rights, keeping land in private ownership and/or remaining a production district because it is designated for long-term forest production.

The RFC agreed to use time at the next meeting to make specific comments on the update. Julie asked the RFC to take a look at the handouts, which were emailed, and at the next meeting talk about the public review draft of the Comp Plan Update.

III. Rural Forest Focus Areas

At the July meeting the RFC asked staff to prepare a report on the Rural Forest Focus Areas. Kathy presented the history of the Rural Forest Focus Areas, the purpose for the designation and how they are used. Kathy explained that in 1994 the State Growth Management Act directed the County to identify forest lands of long-term commercial significance. The County had already designated the FPD in 1985 so it did not propose major changes to that designation in 1994. There were however, comments from rural resident that there were other forested properties that deserved recognition as having commercial significant for forestry. In response, the County identified what are now the Rural Forest Focus Areas (RFFA). These are properties zoned as Rural 5-acre or 10-acre that still have significant forest cover. Kathy said that Rural Forest Focus Areas are recognized in code – e.g., if you want to be a sending site for Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), whether you have 5-acre or 10-acre zoning, you are recognized at one unit per five acres sending credit to make the program a little more desirable for people in RFFA. Marketing for the County’s technical assistance programs, outreach for current use taxation programs and stewardship classes are focused in these areas, but we don’t turn people away if they are outside these areas, said Kathy.

Kathy said that most of the RFFAs are adjacent to the FPD. In addition, Vashon is not formally in the RFFA because lots tend to be smaller, but programmatically it is treated as part of the RFFA. Julie asked what it would take to get Vashon designated as RFFA. Kathy said that would be an appropriate thing for the RFC to consider recommending in the Comp Plan comments.

IV. Proposed Snoqualmie Land Use Change

Kathy showed the RFC a land use change just outside the City of Snoqualmie that is to be proposed in the Comp Plan Update and asked if they wanted to include it in their Comp Plan review. The zoning is Rural 5-acre in the joint Snoqualmie/KC planning area. The landowners want to be considered part of the urban growth area “Urban Reserve.” After much discussion the RFC concluded that while there is concern with creeping urban line into the forest zone, review of this specific proposal would take the commission beyond its role in advising on broad policy issues.

Taylor Mountain and Ring Hill Forest Update

Bill Loeber, King County Forester

Bill showed a video of a KING TV report on the Summer Youth Forestry Institute that Amy Grotta conducted in the Taylor Mountain Forest this summer with a grant from the Natural Resource Stewardship Network. The interns worked with Bill Loeber to set up monitoring plots (down and dead woody debris, what is growing, habitat values, etc.) called from in the County's forest management plan. A number of forestry professionals come out to work with the youth, including Commissioner Alex Kamola. Bill said that the Forestry Program has been forced to scale back on outreach because of budget constraints and that grant projects such as this help fill the gap. Bill praised the instructors for the quality training that the interns received.

In a brief update on other forest management news, Bill said that the Ring Hill and Island Center Forest Timber sales were purchased by Fritch Mill in Snohomish County.

Alpine Lakes Wilderness Bill

Jim Franzel, RFC member

Jim reported that Congressman Dave Reichert has announced his intention to introduce legislation to expand the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. The new designation will include lands on the Pratt River and may include additional forested land on the north side of I-90 at the trailhead.

[Press release at <http://www.house.gov/reichert/press07/8.8.07.shtml>.]

Suggestions for future agendas

1. Schedule a longer than usual meeting on the Comp Plan update at the November meeting.
2. Brainstorm on rural economic strategies and hear a report back on the Fire BMPs the January 16, 2008 meeting.
3. Give updates on the Washington Biodiversity Forum.
4. Report from Congressman Dave Reichert's office on the expansion of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held Thursday, November 8, 2007, at 9:00 a.m. in Preston.

Staff Liaison:

Linda Vane, Forestry Program

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